

Virginia Wastewater Surveillance Program: Community of Practice

WWS Team

VDH | Office of Environmental Health Services

October 27, 2021



Agenda

1. Updates & Funding Opportunities (5 mins)

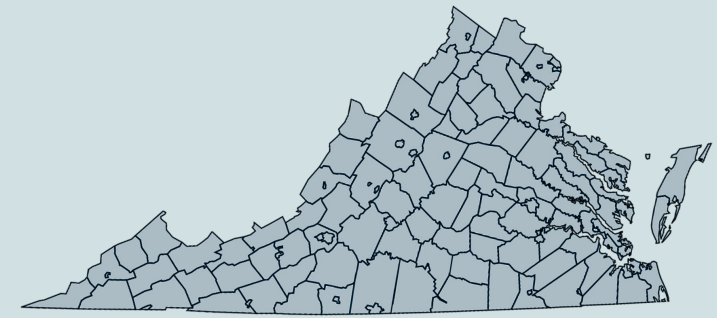
2. Topic(s) of Interest (15 mins):

Working with Media

3. Open Discussion (5-10 mins)



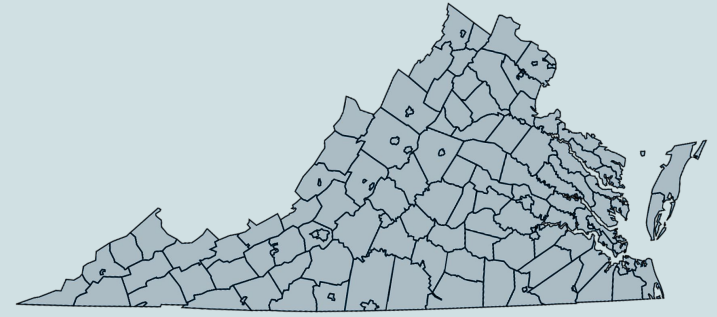
Sentinel Monitoring Updates



Weekly SARS-CoV-2 monitoring at influent to 25 wastewater treatment plants statewide starting on September 13: 7 weeks!

- ❖ Results shared with the participating utilities
- ❖ Finalizing template of Analysis Reports for utilities
- ❖ Uploading data to DCIPHER
- ❖ Troubleshooting logistics & data collection
- ❖ Dashboard & database in development
- ❖ Presentation at VOWRA conference

Updates



Localized Projects

- Chesapeake: project extension & conference
- DOC/FDA: beginning phases
- Will be accepting applications soon!

CDC NWSS Updates

- Wastewater data will be available *soon* for viewing at [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#)



Working with the Media

Communicate for understanding:

Matching message with audience

Tammie Smith

Public Relations Coordinator
FOIA Coordinator
Office of Communications
Virginia Department of Health

Communicating for Understanding:
Matching the Message with the Audience
October 27, 2021

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About the VDH Office of Communications

VDH Newsroom: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/>

What's there:

List of media contacts

COVID, Internal Comms, Regional PIOs

Statewide and regional press releases

Who is your audience?

- **Colleagues** - talking points, internal documents, briefs, memos
- **Media** - press releases, press statements, press conferences
- **Public** - FAQs, graphics, shareables, ads, press conferences
- **Funders** - applications, briefs, technical documents, memos

Working with the media

Media outlets include:

- TV, radio
- Online news operations such as Kaiser Health News, ProPublica
- Newspapers
- Bloggers
- Trade publications
- Student publications
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)

Local vs. statewide vs. national

- Various levels of expertise and resources.

Visuals: TV stations usually want someone on camera where newspapers want a photo opportunity other than a talking head.

Media relations normally

Reporter/media initiated:

- Reporter emails or calls, usually in response to breaking news, hot topic of the day, etc., requesting a comment, person to interview, or more information.
- Ask the reporter to email you the request clarifying what the reporter is seeking and their deadline. Contact the VDH Office of Communications to develop a response. Often reports will email multiple PIOs.
- Generally the VDH public information officers work with the reporter to set up interviews with the subject matter experts (SMEs), gather additional data or information, make sure VDH position is represented accurately
- Requests tracked via media alerts and VDH in the News

VDH initiated:

- Press releases, media briefings, satellite media tours, guest editorials, held to proactively deliver a message or to respond to multiple media inquiries on a single topic. Press releases are approved by the Office Directors and Director of Communications.
- During COVID you will notice the Governor for a time was holding weekly news briefings. VDH was also doing weekly telephone news briefing at various points during COVID-19 response.
- Work with partners to coordinate messaging. Joint press releases with other agencies, i.e., VDH and the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association

Working with the media during a crisis

COVID-19 communications response has elements of both risk and crisis communications

- Risk communications - preparing for things that might go wrong
- Crisis communications - dealing with things that have gone wrong

Media goals:	VDH Goals	
Getting access to information right away	Be a trusted, credible source	Subject matters experts spokesperson training; assigning VDH public information officers specific topics (CVCs, monoclonal antibodies, testing, etc.), social media; meeting goals of responding by reporters' deadlines
Meeting rapid deadlines	Provide timely response	Advance planning for press releases and media statements tied to national developments, press briefings, letting media know when a statement is coming, afterhours and weekend access, posting to social media
Keeping the public informed	Provide accurate information (based on what is known at the time)	FAQs, data dashboards, proactive media (tours of community vaccination centers)
Source: https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Messages_and_Audiences.pdf		



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SAMPLE MESSAGE PLANNING

Audience	Key Message	Supporting Facts	Communication Channel
General Public	A pandemic flu is a worldwide flu outbreak.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Pandemic flu occurred 3 times in the last century.▪ Most scientists believe it's only a matter of time until there's another pandemic.▪ The flu spreads from person to person and is highly contagious.▪ Pandemic flu is expected to have a high death rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Department website▪ Fact sheet▪ Press release to newspaper, local TV
General Public	If the current Asian bird flu spreads to humans, no one will be protected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The U.S. is working with the World Health Organization to take necessary steps to meet the threat of a flu pandemic.▪ Vaccine will not be available initially.▪ New vaccine production can take as long as 3-6 months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Department website▪ Fact sheet▪ Press release to newspaper, local TV
General Public	We are prepared to respond with a flu pandemic plan in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ We have stepped up disease tracking capabilities.▪ We have trained staff & partners to respond through mass dispensing drills based on county plans.▪ We are coordinating with federal agencies to receive and distribute vaccine once it is made available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Department website▪ Fact sheet▪ Press release to newspaper, local TV

CRISIS EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATIONS (CERC)



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™

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DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH

Protecting You and Your Environment

Preparing for interviews

- Prepare talking points and message map with assistance of public information office
 - Talking Points (cover who, what, when, where, why, how, what's next)
 - Message map, main points with supportive/secondary statements
- Research any trending news on the topic
- Research what reporter or publication has written previously on the topic.

During the interview

- Stay on topic/message.
- Concentrate on what is being said.
- Ask clarifying questions (So what I am hearing you say is __; rephrase the question.
- It's ok to say, "That's a great question, I don't know the answer. I will follow up with you." Be sure to follow up.
- Turn negatives into positives and always bridge back to your key message(s).
 - "What is most important is"
 - "What we should focus on is ..."
 - "What the public should know is ..."
 - "That speaks to a larger point ..."
 - "I don't know that answer, but what I can tell you is ..."



Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:

- Empathy and caring.
- Competence and expertise.
- Honesty and openness.
- Commitment and dedication.

Top Tips:

- Consistent messages are vital.
- Don't over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Express wishes. ("I wish I had answers.")
- Explain the process in place to find answers.
- Acknowledge people's fear.
- Give people things to do.
- Ask more of people (share risk).

As a Spokesperson:

- Know your organization's policies.
- Stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- Embody your agency's identity.

Prepare to Answer These Questions:

- Are my family and I safe?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who is in charge here?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?
- Were you forewarned?
- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What does this information mean?

Stay on Message:

- "What's important is to remember..."
- "I can't answer that question, but I can tell you..."
- "Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers..."
- "Let me put that in perspective..."

Be First. Be Right. Be Credible.



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Information sharing

Freedom of Information Act determines what public/government documents are exempt from disclosure

<http://foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov/2021Law.pdf>

FOIA request does not have to be in writing.

FOIA does not require you to create documents that do not exist

Email communications used to conduct public business are subject to FOIA

Sample pandemic-related media FOIA requests:

- Records showing the number of COVID-19 vaccines discarded in Mount Rogers, Cumberland Plateau and Lenowisco health districts since availability began.
- I was wondering if VDH could provide a list of all contracts signed/executed as part of the agency's COVID-19 response from March 7, 2020 to Sept. 15, 2021?
- I am working on a story about the ViSSTA program and was just curious how many school divisions have signed up to participate in the program at this time.
- I am reaching out to ask for electronic copies of emails referencing Moderna and Pfizer sent or received during the period Wednesday, April 7 - Friday, April 9 between the following people: Tammie Smith, Logan Anderson, Melissa Gordan and Maria Reppas.

Questions & Open Discussion



See you next month!

Send inquiries / topics to:
rekha.singh@vdh.virginia.gov

